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AUTHOR Denne, Joan M.
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ABSTRACT

A class of preschoolers, aged 44-63 months and grouped according to age, sex, sibling position, family size and the occupation of each parent, were the subjects of a 2-part study to examine preschoolers' perceptions of mothers. In the first part of the study, each child was shown 4 sets of pictures depicting a variety of possible mother figures. The child was asked, "Which of these are mothers?" with no limit on the number of choices made. The findings suggest that age of the depicted mother was the most important perceptual detail and that the 'composite mother' constructed from the most often chosen pictures in each set was a middle-aged women with medium-length hair holding her child. The number of choices made ranged from 3-11 out of a possible total of 12. It is suggested that variability and number of perceptual details which contribute to a child's concept of 'mother' is a representative measure of his conceptual development. In the second part of the study, each child was asked to draw a picture of a mother. The picture analysis suggests that: (1) boys and young children perceive mothers as more corrective than girls and older children, (2) children from blue-collar families perceive mothers as more supportive and more feminine than children from white-collar families do, and (3) childrens' perceptions of maternal role become broader with increasing age. (GO)

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MOTHERS DON'T HAVE LONG HAIR: An Exploratory Study of Preschool Perceptions of Mother

by Joan M. Denne

Prepared for Course # 63-318

"Programs and Techniques for Teachers Promoting Cognitive and Perceptual Growth in Young Children"

Instructor: Camille J. Turkiewicz

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Purpose

The title of this paper and, in fact, the idea for this particular research came from a member of the preeschool class which I teach.

A few days after a family group picture of me appeared in a local newspaper, one of my students told me that she had seen the picture of "Mrs. Denne and her family--her husband and her two boys." The fact that she had seen this picture was mentioned several times after that.

About a month later, while we were singing, I turned my back to the class to act out part of the song. My hair, quite long, worn in a pony tail, was thud quite visible. The same girl immediately demanded (interrupting her singing), "You're a mother, aren't you?" I said I was. "But you can't be a mother; mothers don't have long hair!" she stated very emphatically.

This was absolutely fascinating to me, as it seemed to indicate that, at least to her, hair style was a more signfiicant item in her perception of a mother than the fact of having children.

How, then, do pre-school-age children perceive mothers? What sorts of information has the child assimilated to form his conception of mother? Is this information mainly perceptual, conceptual, or a combination of both? Do all the children have essentially the same mother concept, or does it vary with the individual? The latter would indicate a variety of factors, such as maturation and experience, entering into the formation of the concept.

This current paper and the survey upon which it is based represents an attempt to explore these areas of cognitive and perceptual understandings of young children.

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Methodology

The original research was done in two separate phases with a preschool class of 24 children. The information gathered was coded and correlated with secondary data gathered from the school records.

In the first phase, each child was shown four different sets of pictures. Varying ages, hair styles and roles of mothers, as well as chickens, were portrayed. In each case, the child was asked, "Which are mothers?" and the child's choices recorded. Each child was then asked, for each picture he did not select, why he did not think it was a mother; note was made of the reason. The pictures used as stimuli are shown in the Appendix.

In the second phase, each child was asked to draw a picture of "a mother." These pictures were then grouped into categories, based on the type of mother depicted. The grouping was acheived independently by a psychologist and by this investigator. There was a high ratio of agreement--doubt was resolved by the investigator, utilizing necessary additional information and her own judgment. This data was then added to the other information gathered, as delineated above. Typical pictures of each category are shown in the Appendix.

All survey instruments used and data-processing forms developed for this study are included in the Appendix.

MY MOTHER

Jane Taylor

Who fed me from her gentle breast,
And hush'd me in her arms to rest,
And on my cheeks sweet kisses prest?
My Mother.

When sleep forsook my open eye,
Who was it sang sweet hushaby
And rock'd me that I should not cry?
My Mother.

Who sat and watch'd my infant head
When sleeping on my cradle bed.
And tears of sweet affection shed?
My Mother.

When pain and sickness made me cry,
Who gazed upon my heavy eye,
And wept, for fear that I should die?
My Mother.

Who drest my doll in clothes so gay,
And taught me pretty how to play,
And minded all I had to say?
My Mother.

Who ran to help me when I fell,
And would some pretty story tell,
Or kiss the place to make it well?
My Mother.

Who taught my infant lips to pray,
And love God's holy book and day,
And walk in wisdom's pleasant way?
My Mother.

And can I ever cease to be
Affectionate and kind to thee,
Who wast so very kind to me.
My Mother.

Ah! no, the thought I cannot bear,
And if God please my life to spare,
I hope I shall reward thy care,
My Mother.

When thou art feeble, old and gray,
My healthy arm shall be thy stay,
And I will soothe thy pains away,
My Mother.

And when I see thee hang thy head,
'Twill be my turn to watch thy bed,
And tears of sweet affection shed,
My Mother.

Introduction

In general psychological terms, much has been written about the way the young child perceives his mother. Flugel describes the image of the mother seen by the child when young as "one of unsurpassable beauty, tenderness and mercy and an ever-available source of comfort, help and protection in the face of the difficulties and dangers of an unknown and often hostile world." (4, p. 55) This is Carl Jung's "original and eternal image of the mother, through which everything is comprehensive, sheltering, nourishing and helpful...that image of the mother...inborn in us of mater natura and mater spibitualis, that image of the whole scope of life to which we are intrusted and at the same time delivered over as helpless children." (10) These are the positive aspects of the mother image that are rather sentimentally glorified in the precedding poem, "My Mother." (15) Basically, these mothers are perceived as nurturing, soothing, protecting and instructing the young child.

There are, however, other factors in the young child's perception of his mother. According to Frances Wickes, while one side of the mother image represents the mother as the "giver of life," on the other side of the mother image the mother represents to the child "the happy irresponsible state before the awakening of consciousness and individual responsibility— the Garden of Eden. In this aspect she is the 'terrible mother" who would swallow up his individuality and keep him always a child, dependent upon her." (17, pp. 11-12) Flugel mentions a child's view of his parent as a "tyrant and oppressor" and as a person of "boundless power and authority... having arbitrary and ruthless disregard of the child's own desires and longings." (4, p. 58)

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Other mothers are seen as "harsh, loud-voiced and punitive." (3, p. 267) According to Gordon, the young child also sees his parents as having a "larger psychological" size, since children see their parents not only as "bigger and stronger, but also as more knowledgeable, more competent. To the young child there is nothing his parents do not know, nothing they cannot do. He marvels at the breadth of their understanding, the accuracy of their predictions, the wisdom of their judgment." (7)

Studies of children in the United States have shown that they think the mother's primary role to be "homemaking." Mothers are generally perceived as "more nurturant, nicer, and more inclined to give presents than father." The mother is preferred for her "nurturant functions" and the "warm and satisfying connotations" of these functions. (6, p. 52) In another study of four-year-olds, most children, when asked what a good mother does, said "cooks and cleans." (11, p. 306) Thus, here, too, the mother is perceived as fulfilling the role of homemaker.

Children's parental perceptions are distinctive in cultures unlike that of the United States. Maori children see their parents as either indifferent or rejecting; the Pilaga Indians of Argentina have intense feelings of hostility toward both parents. Between the Maori and Pilaga modes of perception and the prevalent mode in Thailand there is a striking difference--parents in the latter being the most respected persons. The King of Thailand (Siam) is seen as taking care of the people as the parents care for their children, and is greatly revered. (6)

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In the Japanese culture, females in general are seen as relatively mild, gentle, and kind. Mothers are not thought of as well-dressed or well-groomed; it is the older-sister type that is perceived as stylish and pretty. She may also work. Mothers are expected to be busy mainly with domestic chores, especially with preparing food or with doing the laundry. (6, p. 30)

In contrast to this, mothers in German child care and youth guidance literature are seen as "bad and cold...the image of the mother is deeply bound up with fear, refusal, hate, stubborness, and so on." (12, p. 227) Other children have a deep-seated sense of having been abandoned or let down by the mother. (3, p. 255)

The nurturant aspect of the mother is certainly an important factor in the child's perception of his mother, but, interestingly enough, in experiments with newborn monkeys, the skin texture of artificial mothers was found to be more important than whether they fed the young or not. The young monkeys "selected and snuggled with a terry-cloth 'mother' at all times except when feeding, at which time they selected the wire, lactating one." In later tests of affection and dependence, the monkeys demonstrated that they preferred the non-nurturant, but soft, mother. (1, p. 65)

The way in which a child perceived his mother is related to a great extent to the stage that child has reached in his cognitive and perceptual development.

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Jean Piaget states that studies "have shown that the earliest substantives of child language are very far from denoting concepts, but rather express commands or desires; ...the fact remains that many expressions, that for us have a purely conceptual meaning, retain in the child mind a significance that is not only effective but also well-nigh magical.

Mme Spielrein has tried to prove that the baby syllables, mama, uttered in so many tongues to call the mother, are formed by labial sounds which indicate nothing more than a prolongation of sucking. 'Mama' would, therefore, be a cry of desire, and then a command given to the only being capable of satisfying this desire. But, on the other hand, the mere cry of 'mama!' has in it a soothing element; insofar as it is the continuation of the act of sucking, it produces a kind of 'hallucinatory satisfaction.' Command and immediate satisfaction are in this case, therefore, almost indistinguishable, and so intermingled are these two factors that one cannot tell when the word is being used as a real command and when it is playing its almost magical role." (13, pp. 3-4)

Some of these "primative phenomena" may well be yet present and playing an important part in the preschool-age child's perception of mother.

The preschool child at age three, four or five will be in the stage of cognitive development called by Piaget the period of preoperational thought, which generally includes children from the ages of from two through seven years.

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There is a rapid conceptual development during the preschool period, and, as "the child develops, schemata become more differentiated, less sensory, more numerous, and the network they form becomes increasingly more complex." (16, p. 13)

The period of preoperational thought has been further divided into two stages:

In the first, the preconceptual stage (ages two through four years), the child makes the first overgeneralized attempts at conceptualization. Representatives of a class are not distinguishable from the class itself.

In the second stage, the preceptual, or intuitive stage (four through seven years), prelogical reasoning appears based on perceptual appearances, and the child is unable to take into account more than one attribute at a time. (14)

As the child selects and organizes sensory stimuli into a meaningful and coherent picture of the world, several factors--maturation, physical experience, and social interaction--will affect the level of complexity and understanding that he will reach at a particular moment. He will be constantly reevaluating his ideas as new information appears.

Thus, when Stone and Church found that "at age four, even those children who know about genital differences between boys and girls consider them secondary to styles of dress or coiffure in determining sex or sex differences, " (6, pp. 28-29) they were describing a typical conclusion for a group of children in the preceptual stage.

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One would expect that each individual child in a group would be at his own particular level of development at any given specific moment.

Thus, in a study of a group of young children, the respondents were shown a picture of a mailman carrying his mailbag and another of the same person playing with his little boy. The children were asked whether the man was a father when he was a mailman, and vice versa. Children's answers showed a developmental progression, from perceiving an individual as limited to a single role in which he is observed, to as having at least one continuous role plus other momentarily occupied roles (consisting of all the roles he occupies), and as functioning in a permanent role but having the potentiality to fill other roles as well. (11, p. 241)

Thus, it would seem that the way in which a child perceives his mother is influenced by the maturational level and experiential background of the child: by the level of conceptual and perceptual development that he has reached, and the kind of experiences he has had, of mother both culturally and genetically defined.

It would seem that the preschool-age child's perception of mother would be based first upon the way in which he views his own mother, since this would be his initial and most meaningful experience. The concept of mother based upon this initial mother experience will be modified and enlarged as the child sees and interacts with other mothers, the mothers of his friends, mothers in the neighborhood, and those seen inthe supermarket. At this point the child may begin to come to some conclusions about mothers in general. Although his perception is still probably quite insular, it will to some extent reflect the culturally accepted views of mother, at least in his own neighborhood.

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The child's view of mother will continue to grow, and to encompass more and more experiences with mothers gained from stories read to him, television, and trips to the zoo. The amount of new information which he is able to assimilate at any given point, of course, is related to the level of maturity he has reached at the time and his own ability to process that information. Therefore, each child will process each new experience in terms of his unique vantage point. It is this gathering and processing of information which engrosses the preschool child. The way in which such children perceive mothers should give interesting insights into the way in which they perceive things in general.

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Independent Variables

The children used in this study comprised a preschool class. All the information about each child used as independent variables came from the original record completed by the parent when the child was registered. An example of this form is shown as Exhibit A in the Appendix.

A sheet of the data abstracted from the registration form was prepared for each child. The information was then categorized on sheets as shown in Exhibits B and C (Appendix), and finally summarized in Tables I and II. From this information, the guidelines for the categories of the child characteristics used in analyzing the research findings were determined. A brief description of these categories follows.

Family size was determined in the following manner: number of siblings (available from form) + one (for child himself) + two (the parents). In all cases at the time of the investigation, there were two parents present in the home, the one originally single parent having remarried earlier in the school year. It was decided to divide the family sizes into three categories for the purpose of analyzing the findings. Over half the children came from a family of four, and added to these were the two families with three members, since that latter category by itself did not have enough members to allow for meaningful analyses. It was then decided to divide the remaining children into two groups: families with 5 members and those with 6 or more members. Each of these groups contained five members, which could give some indicatory meaning as the result of breakdowns. A summary of this data is given in Table I.

The age of each child was calculated from the date of birth, adjusted to March, 1975, the month in which the research was done. The children were then divided on the basis of age into three categories: young, middle and old. Table II shows the actual ages in months of the children in the sample and the manner in which they were divided. The cumulative percentages were

computed as an aid in dividing the sample according to appropriate age groupings. The final category the child was placed in is shown on the right.

Happily, the class of preschoolers used for this research was divided almost equally among boys (12) and girls (13). This even distribution allows for clearcut distinctions to be made upon analysis. The sex composition of the class is interesting in light of one extant theory that more boys are sent to preschool than girls because they are more "wearing" at home.

Since the registration form provided information about the child's place in the family, sibling position was used as another basis for analysis. The categories chosen were youngest, middle and oldest child. It was decided to leave "only child" as a separate category although it included only 2 children, since it could not be placed correctly in the other categories. As can be seen from Table I, almost half the class (11) were youngest children, which a little surprising. It would be interesting to explore the area of whether the older members of the family had also attended preschool, or if there is a tendency to send later members to school earlier. It could be argued that as more children come along there are diminished resources available for such items of optional expenditure as preschool training. However, the facts appear to indicate that this is not the case. The fact that the mothers may have gone to work at least part time is also insufficient to explain this. Perhaps the value of the preschool experience is becoming more accepted, or perhaps the mothers simply need time with no children at home.

Although the registration form did not specifically ask for the mother's occupation, the fact that the mother worked was usually noted. I also verified this information from my own knowledge, through the parents' club, the local PTA, community organizations and cub scouting program. Only five of the mothers were working in this sample, but it was decided to include

this category in the analysis, as it might show findings of interest.

The final category which was derived from the form was the father's occupation. This was coded from the information given as either blue- or white-collar, by the usual standards (utilizing knowledge of the Dictionary of Occupational Titles). There were three cases where insufficient detail was given for classification; these were left in a category of "Indeterminable." Slightly more than half the occupations were white-collar (14). This appears to reflect a somewhat greater percentage than is actually resident in the neighborhood served by the school.

There were other categories which were considered for analysis when evaluating the variables for this study. These were rejected for various reasons. The small size of the sample (25) meant that not infrequently a category contained so few members that no analysis would be meaningful. In the case of race, there was one Black and one Indian child, with the remainder being Whites. In the case of type of dwelling, homes being apartments or houses could be checked by examining them through site visits. When it had been determined that 21 were houses, with 4 to check, this category was rejected as inapplicable.

On the other hand, there were variables meriting inclusion which were rejected due to practicable difficulties within the scope and time constraints of this investigation. The educational level, income range, or other socioeconomic characteristic, for instance, might certainly be related to the breadth of experience the children might have available to bear upon their perceptions.

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Table I

Independent Variable Summary

Family Size

Size	Responses
3	2
4	13
5	5
6	4
10	1

Recap:

4 or less	15
5	5
6+	5

Age *

Young (Y)	8
Medium (M)	9
Older	8

Sex

Male	Female
12	13

Sibling Position

Only Child	2
Youngest	11
Middle	6
Oldest	6

Mother's Activity

Working	5
Nonworking	20

Father's Occupation

Indeterminable	3
White-collar	14
Blue-collar	8

* See Table II for detail.

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Table II

Ages of Respondents, in Months

Months	Number	Equivalents	Cumulative Percentages Ascending	Cumulative Percentages Descending	Code
63	1	5 years, 3 mos.	4	100	O
62	1	5 years, 2 mos.	8	96	O
58	2	4 years, 10 mos.	16	92	O
57	4	4 years, 9 mos.	32	84	O
56	1	4 years, 8 mos.	36	68	M
55	2	4 years, 7 mos.	44	64	M
53	2	4 years, 5 mos.	52	56	M
52	1	4 years, 4 mos.	56	48	M
51	3	4 years, 3 mos.	68	44	M
48	2	4 years	76	32	Y
46	2	3 years, 10 mos.	84	24	Y
45	1	3 years, 9 mos.	88	16	Y
44	3	3 years, 8 mos.	100	12	Y

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Aided Perception of Mother

In the first phase of the original research, as mentioned earlier, each child was shown four sets of pictures. The pictures were shown to each child a set at a time, one after another, and the photographs identified as mothers were immediately circled on an index card already prepared, in order to make the data recording more facile and accurate. All the information was gathered on the same day, except for two absent children, who were questioned the next day, and one child who left school between the compilation of the independent variables and the gathering of the original responses. For this reason, the sample size of the first phase was 24. It is important to note that the child was allowed to identify as many or as few mothers as he wished in each set.

The first set of pictures shown each child can be found in Exhibit D of the Appendix. It showed three faces intended to represent possible mother figures of varying ages: an older-sister type, a middle-aged woman and a grandmother type. Table 1 shows the responses tabulated in terms of varying characteristics of the children involved.

There were very few results that showed an overwhelming choice of any sort, but there were some exceptions to this which were very interesting. One of the most striking findings was that while the middle-aged woman was picked 18 times and the younger woman 15 times, only 3 children perceived the older woman as a mother. This is even more interesting when considered in the light of the fact that,when the children were asked why they thought she wasn't a mother, the answer was "that's a grandmother!" in almost every case. When asked, "Aren't grandmothers mothers?" the answer was either "No, they are grandmothers!" or "I don't know."

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The younger woman was rejected on the basis of being "too small" (in the sense of "young"), and of being a sister, a lady, and a little girl. The middle-aged woman was seen as a teacher, a grandmother, and too old. One child rejected every picture in every group except the middle-aged woman and the one serving food, on the basis that the person pictured differed from her mother in some detail, such as hair color, style of shoes, color of lipstick, and wearing of glasses. These pictures were chosen enough times, however, that this didn't seem to be a general difficulty, but rather the cognitive level of this particular child.

It can be noted that all the children who perceived the grandmother-type as being a mother were from families of four or less, whose male heads were in a white-collar occupation and whose female head was nonworking. It is also interesting that while 10 of the 13 girls picked the younger woman as being a mother, only 5 of the 11 boys in the sample perceived her in this way. This suggests that boys may not have as flexible a perception of mothers as do girls.

It also appears that the younger woman was chosen by a proportionately larger number of children from large families (5 or more members) and by children from blue-collar families. The breakdowns by the age of the child and by the sibling position did not suggest any special trends.

The second set of pictures, Exhibit E in the Appendix, showed three different women: one with short hair, one with medium-length hair, and one with definitely long hair. Although they were obviously different women, they were roughly the same age. Table 2 summarizes the results of this aspect of the research.

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The investigator naturally wondered (see "Purpose") whether the long-haired stimulus would be perceived as a representation of a mother less frequently than the others, or not. The findings showed, however, that this depiction did, in fact, not succeed in eliciting a mother-recognition response less often than the others to any significant degree. Although the woman with the middle-length hair was chosen most frequently (18 times), both the long-haired and short-haired women were selected 14 times each. One third of the class (8 children) perceived all three women as being mothers.

The short-haired woman was several times perceived as a grandmother. The women with the short hair and the middle-length hair were both seen as grandmothers by two children. The long-haired woman was identified as a sister, a girl, and a guest.

It appears that boys may be less influenced by hair style, since the ones in the sample perceived more of the women as mothers than did the girls (25 choices for 11 boys, or 2.3 choices each; 21 choices for 13 girls, or 1.6 choices each). Every boy perceived the woman with the medium-length hair as being a mother, as did 12 of the 13 children from white-collar families.

Age, family size, and whether or not the mother worked showed nothing of significance. It is interesting to note that the only children (there were two of them) made just one choice in each of the first two sets of pictures (with age of mothers and hair length of mothers as variables), the young woman and the woman with long hair.

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The third set of pictures showed three women in varying activities, and is shown as Exhibit F in the Appendix. The woman holding the child was chosen the most times (21, or 88 percent of the respondents, chose that depiction as being that of a mother). The woman serving food was selected as a mother 17 times (or by 74 percent of the respondents). The mother in the work-related activity was chosen the least number of times, 12 (or by only 52 percent of the children in the sample). Even this latter low response rate represents, however, more than half the class, so that the perceptions of mothers in specific roles is not as stereotyped as had been anticipated.

Breakdowns by the various available characteristics of the children did not show any particularly notable tendencies.

It is interesting that 10 children (42 percent of the sample) perceived all three women as being mothers. Only one child rejected the woman riding the tractor because she was riding a tractor. One child perceived her as a ballet dancer. Two children didn't perceive the third woman as a mother because she was "cooking," and one said that she was a "daddy."

The last set of pictures shows chickens for identification as mothers (Exhibit G in the Appendix). Included were a hen, a rooster and a hen with chicks. First must be mentioned that when initially shown these pictures and asked "Which of these are mothers?" about half the class said none of them were, "Because they are chickens!" The investigator then rephrased the question as "Which are chicken mothers?" The answers to that question were then recorded. The answers given are shown in Table 4, with the characterisitics of the children given, as well.

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All but four children (20) perceived the hen with the chicks as being a mother. It is interesting that much smaller, and almost equal, numbers of children picked the hen (9, or 38 percent) and the rooster (7, or 29 percent). It is quite possible that the presence of the chicks was the thing recognized and that most of the children didn't know very much about chickens. Several children were aware of the rooster being a male, or "a dad"; others said that he was not like the hens, and thus was not a mother. One child perceived only the rooster as a mother, because it was the only chicken with "the fancy stuff on its head." The child-characteristic breakdowns showed little in the way of predictive tendencies.

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Table 1

Child's Perception of Mother: Age, According to Characteristics of Chil

Child Characteristic	Photographs Identified as Mothers			Total
	Young	Middle-aged	Old	
Age				
Young	4	5	1	7
Middle	6	7	1	9
Old	5	6	1	8
Sex				
Male	5	8	2	11
Female	10	10	1	13
Father Occup.				
Blue	6	7	0	8
White	7	10	3	13
Indet.	2	1	0	3
Family Size				
-4	6	12	3	15
5	5	3	0	5
6+	4	3	0	4
Sibling Posit.				
Youngest	6	10	2	11
Middle	5	3	0	5
Oldest	2	5	1	6
Only	2	0	0	2
Mother Status				
Nonworking	12	15	3	19
Working	3	3		5
Total Picking Category	15	18	3	24

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Table 2

Child's Perception of Mother:Hair Length, According to Characteristics of Child

Child Characteristic	Photographs Identified as Mothers			Total
	Short Hair	Medium Hair	Long Hair	
Age				
Young	5	5	3	7
Middle	7	7	7	9
Old	2	6	4	8
Sex				
Male	6	11	8	11
Female	8	17	6	13
Father Occup.				
Blue	6	4	5	8
White	7	12	6	13
Indet.	1	2	3	3
Family Size				
-4	8	10	9	15
5	3	5	2	5
6+	3	3	3	4
Sibling Posit.				
Youngest	8	8	7	11
Middle	2	5	3	5
Oldest	4	5	2	6
Only	0	0	2	2
Mother Status				
Nonworking	11	15	11	19
Working	3	3	3	5
Total Picking Category	14	18	14	24

000027

Table 3

Child's Perception of Mothers Activity Pictured, According to Characteristics of Child

Child Characteristic	Photographs Identified as Those of Mothers			Total
	Cooking	Mother with Child	Working	
Age				
Young	3	7	3	7
Middle	7	9	7	9
Old	7	5	2	8
Sex				
Male	9	9	5	11
Female	8	12	7	13
Father's Occup.				
Blue	6	7	4	8
White	9	12	8	13
Indeterminate	2	2	0	3
Family Size				
-4	9	14	8	15
5	4	4	2	5
6+	4	3	2	4
Sibling Position				
Youngest	8	10	6	11
Middle	4	3	2	5
Oldest	4	6	3	6
Only	1	2	1	2
Mother's Status				
Nonworking	13	17	10	19
Working	4	4	2	5
Total Picking Category	17	21	12	24

00028

Table 4

Child's Perception of Mother: Chickens, According to Characteristics of Child

Child Characteristic	Figures Identified as Those of Mothers			Total
	Hen	Hen with Chicks	Rooster	
Age				
Young	2	6	1	7
Middle	5	8	4	9
Old	2	6	2	8
Sex				
Male	7	9	4	11
Female	2	11	3	13
Father's Occupation				
Blue	3	7	2	8
White	4	11	4	13
Indeterminate	2	2	1	3
Family Size				
-4	5	13	4	15
5	3	4	2	5
6+	1	3	1	4
Sibling Position				
Youngest	4	11	3	11
Middle	2	3	1	5
Oldest	3	4	3	6
Only	0	2	0	2
Mother's Status				
Nonworking	6	15	4	19
Working	3	5	3	5
Total Picking Category	9	20	7	24

00029

Unaided Perceptions of Mother

In the second phase of the research, crayons and large pieces of paper were put out on tables. The children were asked to draw a picture of "a mother." Although all 24 of the class utilized in the first phase were present that day, one child did not want to make a picture, and was eliminated. Therefore, the sample size for this section was 23. The researcher had originally hoped to discuss in depth each child's drawing with him as it was being done, since it was felt that this would be a good way to gain insight into each individual's perceptions of mother. However, it was decided prior to implementation of this portion of the study that that approach was not feasible within the classroom framework. This was because the in-depth approach would take too long and because it would be impractical to remove the investigator and child from the rest of the group for any extended period of time.

It was decided, however, to continue on the basis of allowing each child to perform a drawing independently, and analyze the drawings later. It was felt that a child's own subjective perception was very important in determining how he perceives mothers, and that this aspect of the study could provide a needed balance for the more objectively measured choices made in the first phase.

It was decided to analyze the drawings in terms of three distinct continuums of perceptual factors. Thus the drawings were classified on the basis of whether the depicted mother was portrayed as being primarily supportive or corrective, whether she was shown as a very feminine figure or as a more sexually neutral adult figure, and finally whether she was perceived in a specific, narrow social role or in a broader, more varied way.

00030

These classifications were in some cases somewhat arbitrary. However, as was alluded to earlier, there was a very high level of agreement between my classifications and an independent psychologist's groupings. This would certainly indicate the validity of this technique. An example of a drawing in each classification is included in the Appendix (Exhibits J-O), although the originals were on larger pieces of paper and in color. An attempt was made to choose examples that would duplicate resonably well, as well as ones that represented a typical example of these more-or-less subjective categorizations.

Table 5 shows the findings when the drawings classified as either having a supportive or corrective view of mothers were arranged by child characteristics. The results suggest that boys tend to perceive the mothers as more corrective than do the girls, since the ratio of supportive to corrective was 4 to 6 for the boys and 9 to 4 for the girls. This is probably a real finding, as there is a tendency to be "tougher" with boys on the part of both parents, and, since boys tend to be "noisier" and "more active" than girls, they may in fact require more correction to meet acceptable standards.

There is also a suggestion that the blue-collar parents tend to be seen proportionately more often as more supportive, the perception of white-collar mothers being almost equally divided in this dimension. This could be explained by the fact that blue-collar parents may have lower expectations for their children and for this reason are less demanding of performance and more tolerant of the child's behavior patterns.

Although a little more than half of the total sample tended to view their mothers as supportive (13), the youngest children in the family tended to see her as corrective in 70 percent of the cases. This is significantly

more often than the children in other sibling positions, where she was seen as corrective in but 3 of 11 cases. Breakdowns by age, family size and whether the mother worked did not show conclusions of definite significance.

Table 6 shows the results when the drawings were classified on the basis of whether the mother was seen as having purely feminine traits, or in a more neutral adult role. It should be mentioned that the classification as perceiving mainly sexual traits was not primarily based on physical attributes, but emphasized functions shown. The results suggest that mother is more often perceived as a neutral adult than as a female (15 to 8, or two-thirds of the time). That this tendency increases with the age of the child can be seen from the age breakdown shown. This is probably directly related to the increased experience with mothers which the child would gain as he grows older.

It is also probably significant that the children from white-collar families definitely depicted the more neutral role more often (10 of 13), blue-collar children more often perceiving the more feminine one (5 out of 7 cases). This, again, is probably related to a broader or more varied experience, which one might expect to find in children of white-collar families. Not only is the white-collar mother more likely to be involved in activities outside the home, but she tends to have a higher educational level and thus to share with the child more varied experiences.

There is also a suggestion that boys tend to see the mother in a more neutral way, as in the case of youngest and only children and children from families of five.

00032

Table 7 shows the drawings of mothers categorized as being perceived as having either broad or narrow roles, arranged by characteristics of the children. Here the sample was more evenly divided, with slightly more seeing the mother in a narrow role (13, or 57 percent). A look at the breakdown by age of the child suggests that older children see the mother's role as broader than do younger ones. This can be explained as again a result of the increased experiences which the older child is likely to have had and thus is able to utilize in forming his perception of mother.

It also appears that boys tend to see the mothers in narrow roles proportionately more often than do girls (7 out of ten times, or 70 percent, for boys and 6 of 13 times, or 46 percent, for girls). This is interesting and may be the result of the fact that there is certainly still some sex stereotyping of roles within the family. The boy, who identifies more often with his father, thus might tend to perceive the mother more narrowly than would a girl in the same household.

The other breakdowns do not suggest any definite trends.

00033

Table 5

Child's Perception of Mother: Unaided Interpersonal Traits, According to Characteristic of Child

Characteristic of Child	Traits Identified		Total
	Supportive	Corrective	
Age			
Young	4	3	7
Middle	4	4	8
Old	5	3	8
Sex			
Male	4	6	10
Female	9	4	13
Father's Occupation			
Blue	5	2	7
White	6	7	13
Indeterminate	2	1	3
Family Size			
-4	8	6	14
5	3	2	5
6+	2	2	4
Sibling Position			
Youngest	3	7	10
Middle	4	1	5
Oldest	4	2	6
Only	2	0	2
Mother's Status			
Nonworking	10	9	19
Working	3	1	4
Total Placed in Category	13	10	23

00034

Table 6

Child's Perception of Mother: Unaided Sex-role Traits, According to Characteristic of Child

Characteristic of Child	Traits Identified		Total
	Neutral Adult	Sexual Traits*	
Age			
Young	4	3	7
Middle	5	3	8
Old	6	2	8
Sex			
Male	7	3	10
Female	8	5	13
Father's Occupation			
Blue	2	5	7
White	10	3	13
Indeterminate	3	0	3
Family Size			
-4	9	5	14
5	5	0	5
6+	1	3	4
Sibling Position			
Youngest	8	2	10
Middle	2	3	5
Oldest	3	3	6
Only	2	0	2
Mother's Status			
Nonworking	12	7	19
Working	3	1	4
Total Placed in Category	15	8	23

* Not including purely physical attributes such as length of hair.

00635

Table 7

Child's Perception of Mother: Unaided Breadth of Role, According to Characteristic of Child

Characteristic of Child	Breadth of Role		Total
	Broad	Narrow	
Age			
Young	2	5	7
Middle	3	5	8
Old	5	3	8
Sex			
Male	3	7	10
Female	7	6	13
Father's Occupation			
Blue	4	3	7
White	5	8	13
Indeterminate	1	2	3
Family Size			
-4	6	8	14
5	1	4	5
6+	3	1	4
Sibling Position			
Youngest	3	7	10
Middle	4	1	5
Oldest	2	4	6
Only	1	1	2
Mother's Status			
Nonworking	9	10	19
Working	1	3	4
Total Placed in Category	10	13	23

00036

Summary and Conclusions

How, then, did these preschoolers perceive mothers? It would seem that, since all of the people pictured in the first three sets could indeed be perceived as mothers and in fact were when the pictures were shown to a few older children, the set of pictures receiving the fewest positive choices would be the one containing the perceptual attribute most important to most children.

Thus, age is judged the most important perceptual detail, receiving for the whole set only 36 choices. The other two sets of pictures both received about the same number of acceptances: 46 for the varying hair style and 50 when the role was varied. The set of pictures showing the chickens received as few choices as the one varying the age; here the presence of the chicks was apparently the deciding factor.

A composite mother constructed from the most perceived picture in each set would be a middle-aged woman with medium-length hair shown with her child (or chicks). Young women and those serving food were close seconds, and hair style made the least difference. She is definitely not an older woman or a grandmother. She is depicted only slightly more often as being supportive than as corrective, and is shown as a neutral adult, without definite sexual traits. However, she is shown more often in a narrow, more traditional role.

Although interesting, this is only half the story. It was quite apparent that each child had indeed a unique and personal perception of mother. There were children, for example, like the author's original example (see "Purpose"), who could not perceive women with long hair as being mothers. For others, it was a different perceptual detail which ruled out a particular choice.

There is no question that perceptual details were more important than conceptual ones for almost every child, which certainly is typical of Piaget's children in the preoperational period, and is reflected in results of other studies of children of the same age. The girl who rejected most pictures, as not having the specific attributes of her own mother, could still be in the preconceptual stage in her perception of mothers. In fact, she wrote her own mother's first and last name under her drawing of a mother (this drawing is shown without the name as Exhibit L in the Appendix).

Most of the other children appeared to be in the preceptual stage, where certain perceptual details often overcame logical thinking. However, each child was at his own special level of sophistication. This is supported by the fact that the range of the number of choices made by a child was from three to eleven (out of a possible twelve), with a fairly even distribution in between. The child who chose 12 would probably be at a level of thought well beyond that of the preschool-age child, and would perceive a mother as does the dictionary: as a female parent.

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APPENDIX

Survey Instruments

OAK PARK RECREATION DEPARTMENT

REGISTRATION AND CHILD'S RECORD
PRE-SCHOOL

EXHIBIT A

RECREATION CENTER _____ DATE _____

NAME OF CHILD _____

ADDRESS _____ PHONE _____

AGE _____ BIRTHDATE MO. _____ DAY _____ YEAR _____

FATHER'S NAME _____ OCCUPATION _____
BUSINESS PHONE _____ MOTHER'S FIRST NAME _____

WIDOWED _____ SEPARATED _____ DIVORCED ___

NUMBER OF OTHER CHILDREN IN FAMILY ____ NAMES AND AGES _____

_____

RELATIVES AT SAME ADDRESS _____

NAME OF CHILD'S PHYSICIAN _____

ADDRESS _____ PHONE _____

NAME OF PERSON TO NOTIFY IN EMERGENCY OTHER THAN PARENT
NAME _____ ADDRESS _____ PHONE _____

What word d child use for void _____ For bowel movement _____ Does child have temper tantrums _____

Does parent have trouble handling child ____ Check if child has any nervous difficulties: thumb sucking ____ nail biting ____ speech difficulties ____ is child left-handed _____

Name allergies _____ Physical handicaps or disabilities _____
(THIS WILL NOT ELIMINATE A CHILD FROM PRESCHOOL)

Reason for wanting child in preschool _____

Discharge to other than parent (daily) _____

(Must be an adult or person approved by Preschool Teacher)
Date of discharge (graduation of other) _____

Signature _____
Parent or Guardian

00041

DATA ABSTRACTION GUIDE--Check Appropriate Categories

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE REGISTRY: INDIVIDUAL

Student	Age			Sex		Housing	
	Young	Medium	Old	Male	Female	Apartment	House

EXHIBIT B

00042

DATA ABSTRACTION GUIDE--Check Appropriate Categories

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE REGISTRY: FAMILY

Student	Father's Occ.		Family Size				Sibling Position			Mother's Activity		
	Blue-collar	White-collar	3	4	5	6+	Youngest	Mid.	Oldest	None	Prof.	Other

EXHIBIT C

00043

EXHIBIT D
Varying age

00044

EXHIBIT E
Varying hair style

EXHIBIT F
Varying role

00017

PICTORIALLY AIDED MOTHER-IMAGE : AGE, COIFFURE and ACTIVITY VARIABLES

Student	Characteristics Identified with Motherhood								
	Age			Coiffure			Activity		
	Young	Medium	Old	Short	Medium	Long	Cooking	Sewing	Typing

EXHIBIT G

00048

EXHIBIT H
Various chickens

00049

INTERVIEWERS' CHECKLIST--Check each identification

ANIMAL MOTHER-ROLE IDENTIFICATION

Student	Hen	Hen with Chicks	Rooster

EXHIBIT I

00050

EXHIBIT J
Picture categorized as supportive

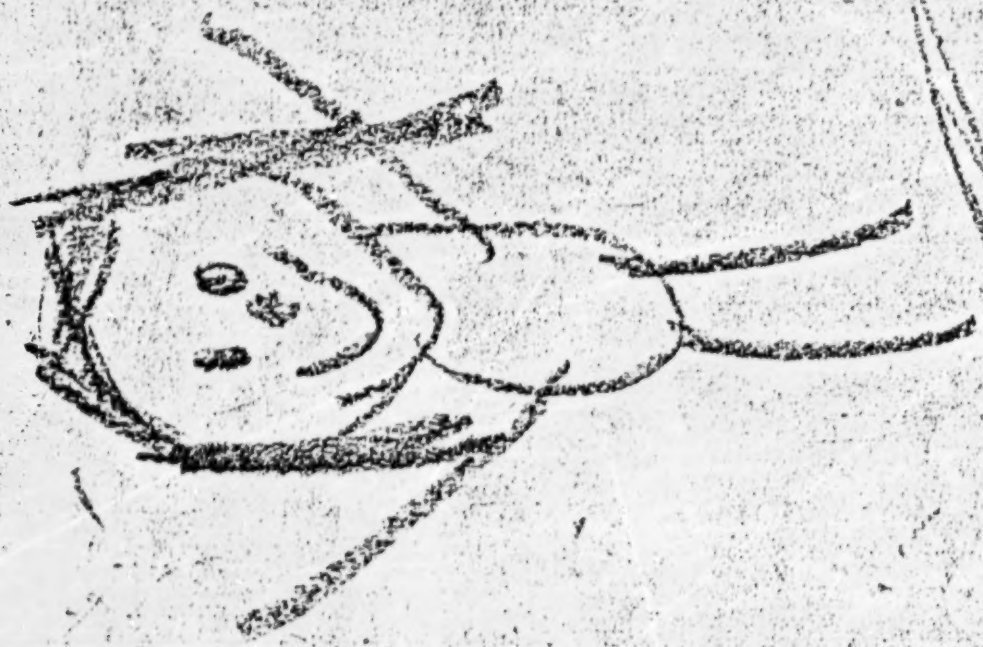


EXHIBIT K
Picture categorized as corrective

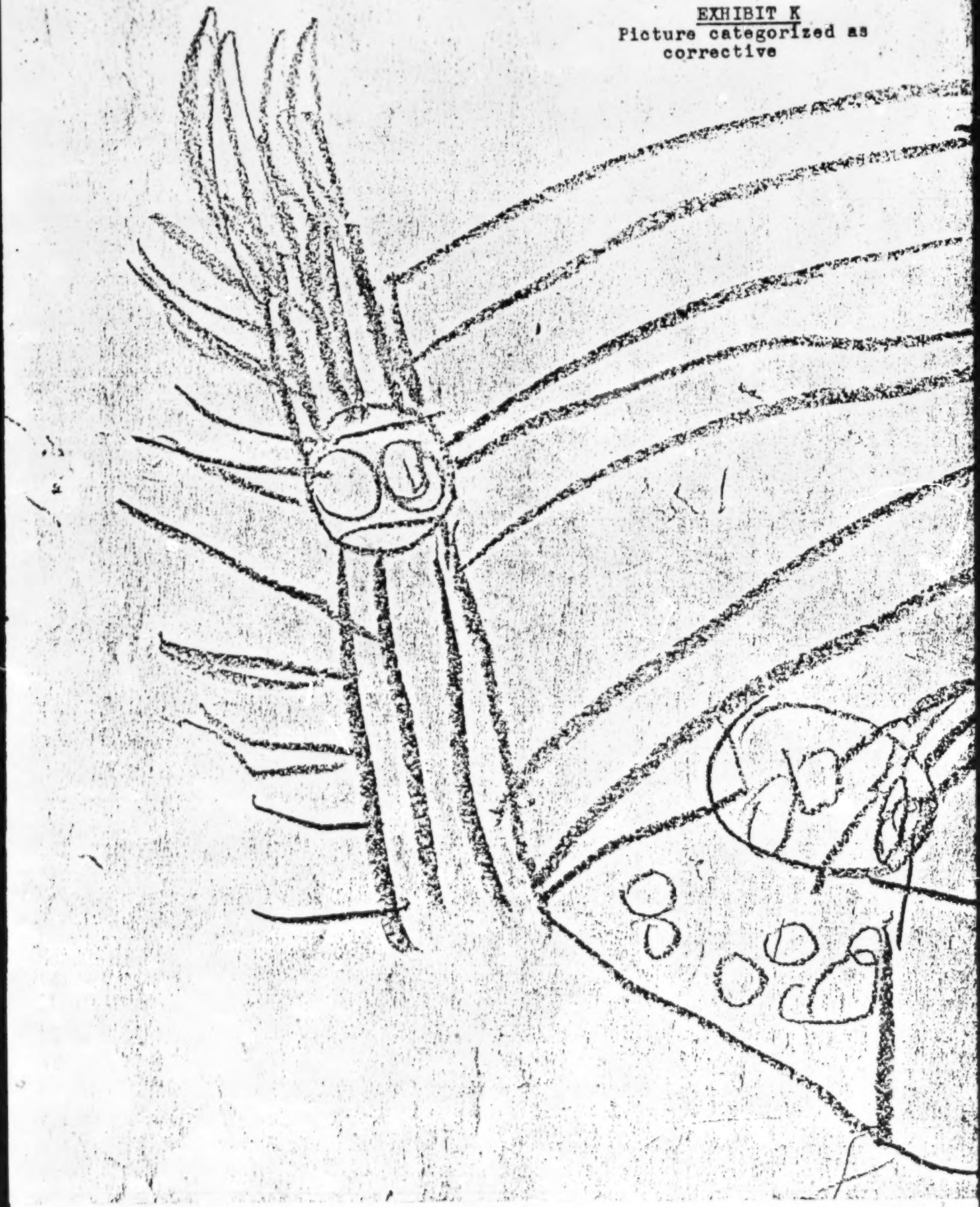


EXHIBIT L
Picture categorized as sexist

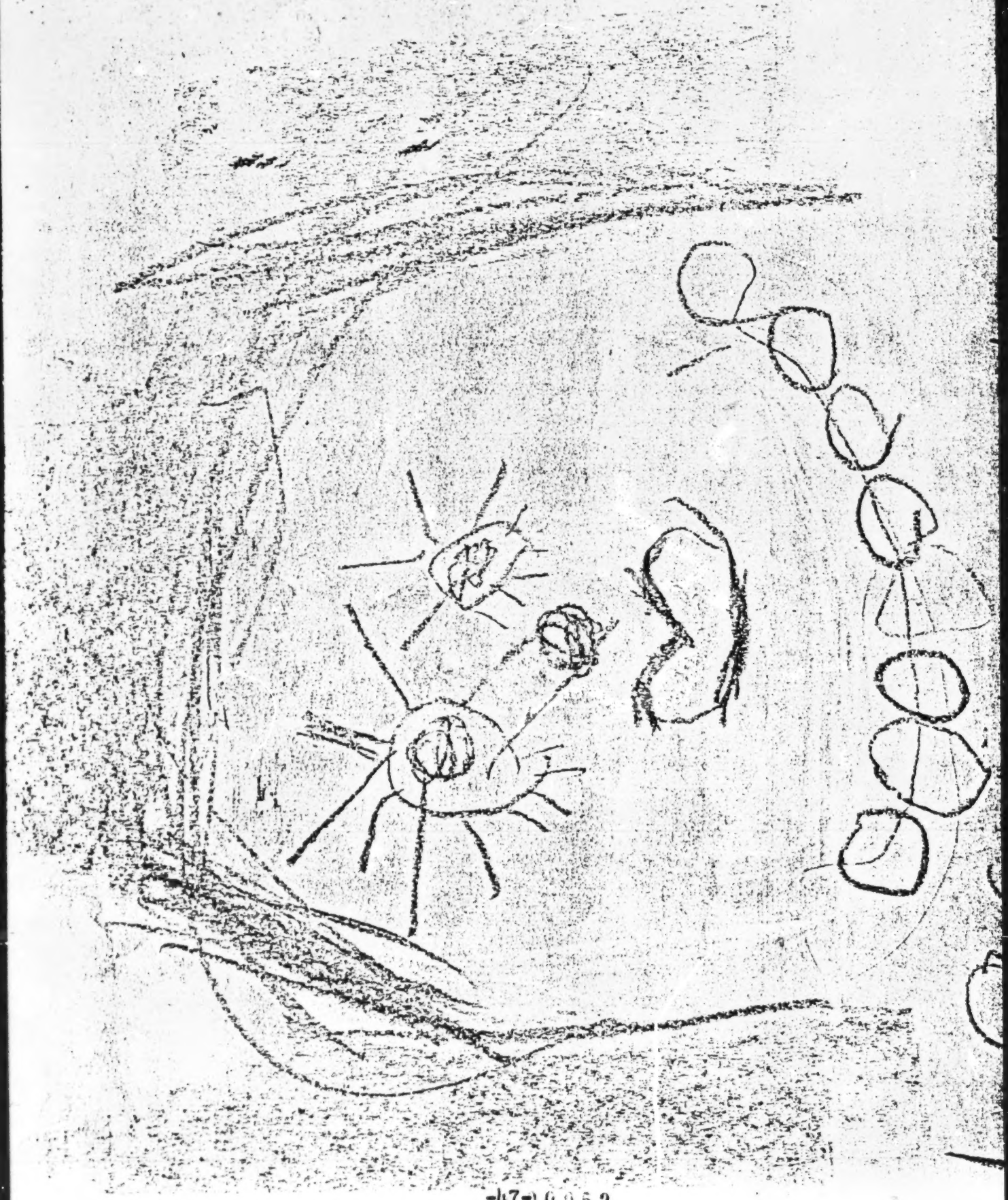


EXHIBIT M

Picture categorized as neutral

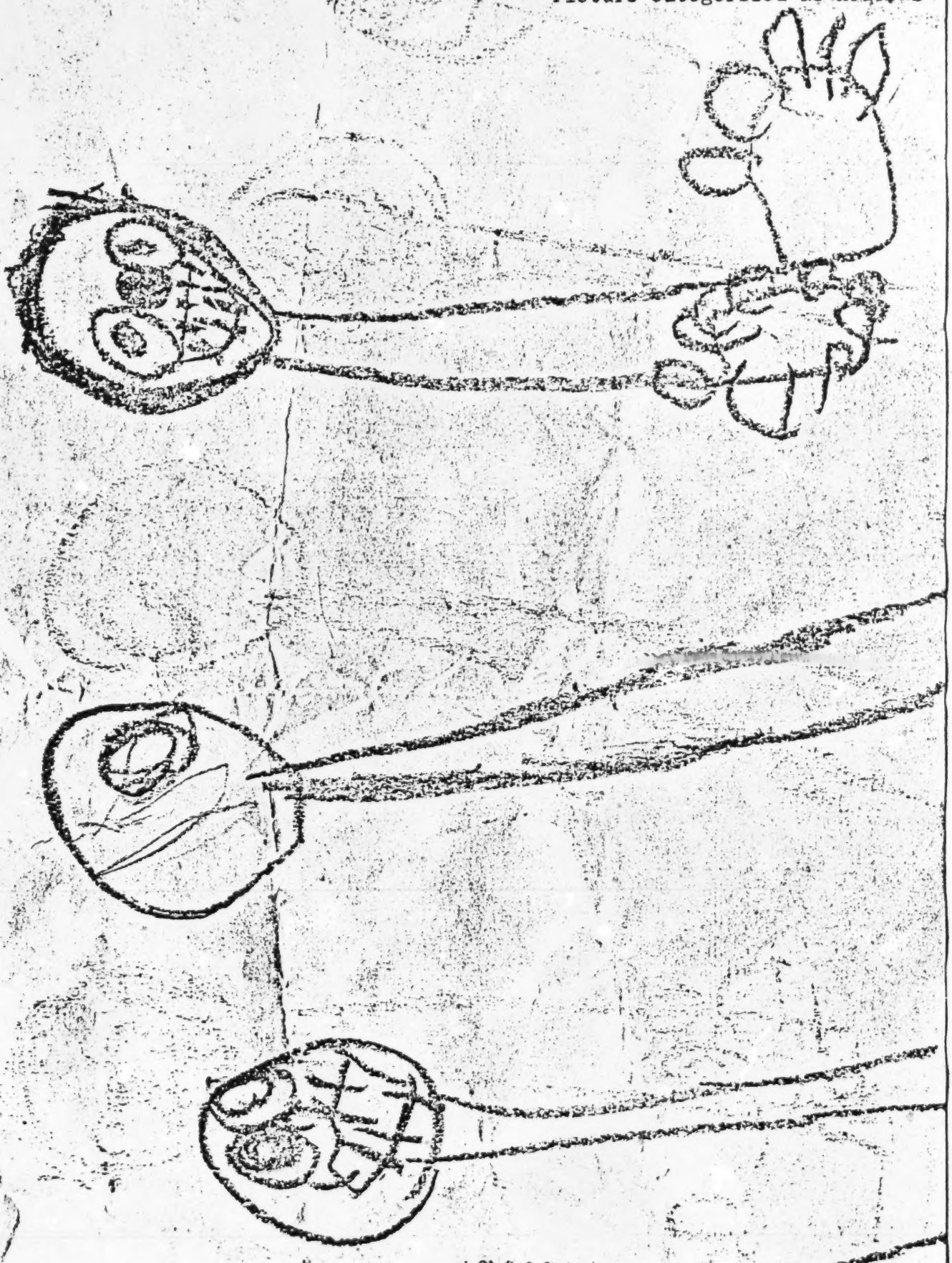


EXHIBIT N
Picture categorized as broad activity

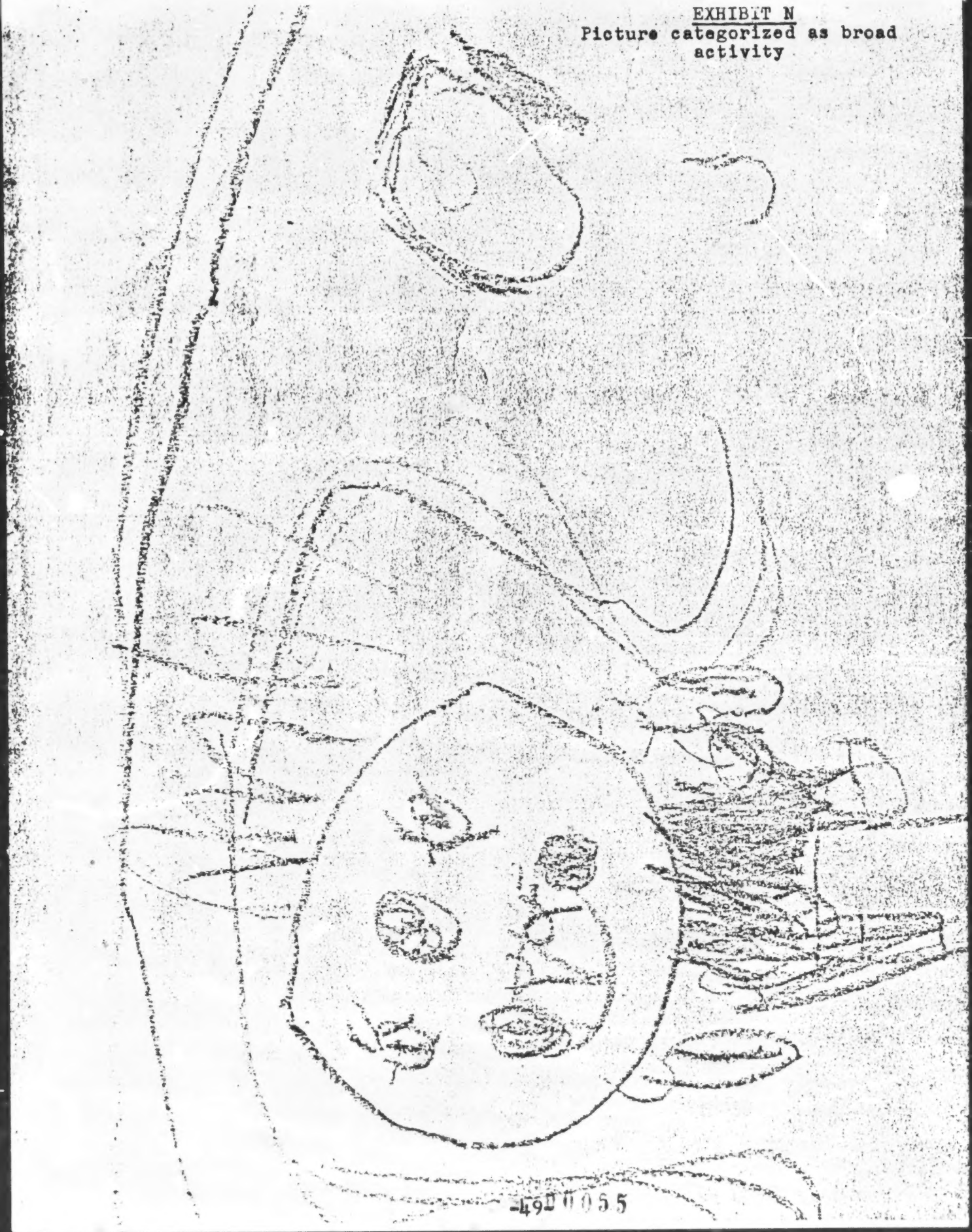
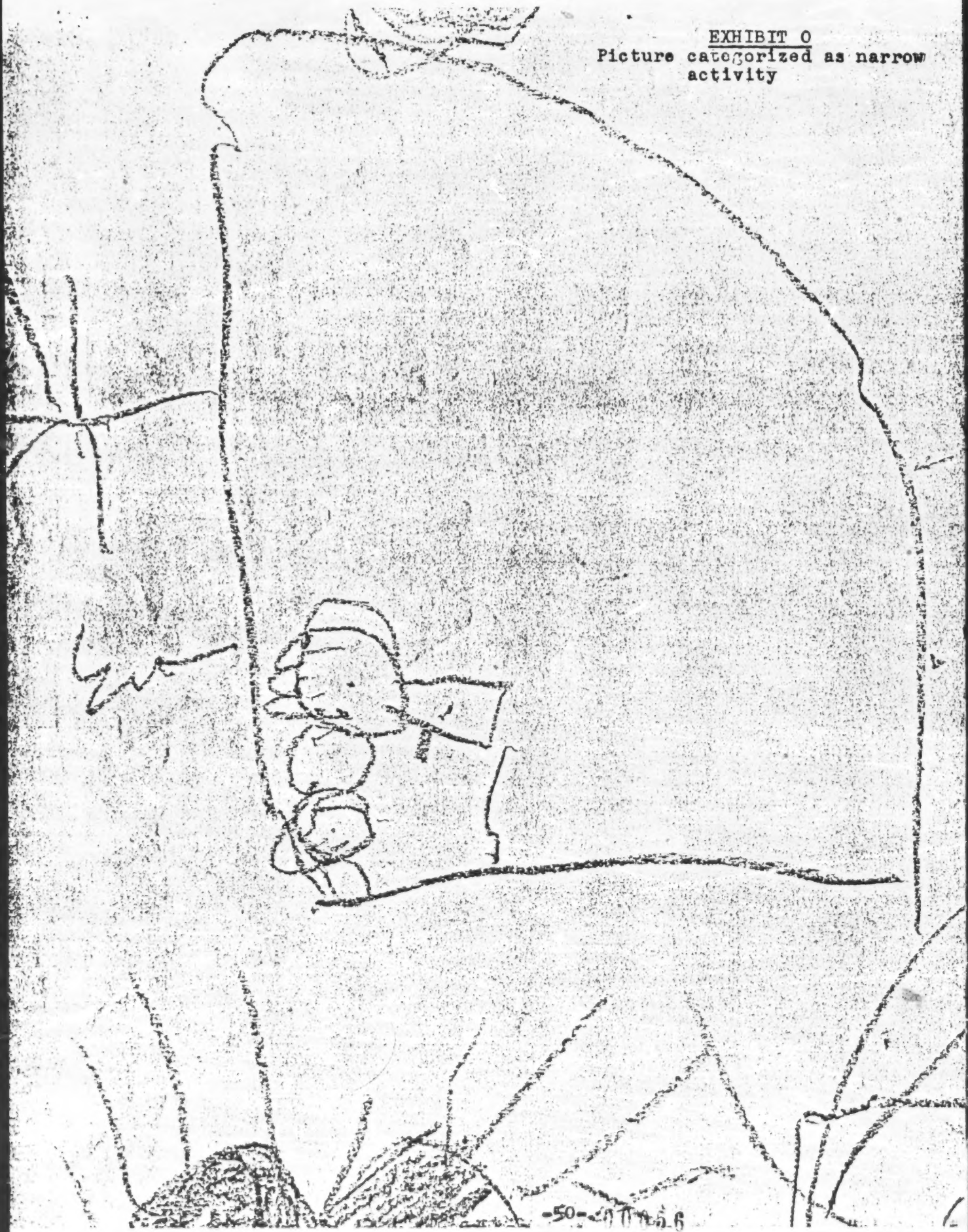


EXHIBIT O
Picture categorized as narrow activity



INTERVIEWERS' CHECKLIST--Check each identification (forced choice)

UNAIDED MOTHER-IMAGE: CHARACTERISTICS ATTRIBUTED

Student	Interpersonal	Sexuality		Activity Dimensions	
	Supportive (or) Corrective	Sexist Role	Neutral Role	Broad	Narrow

EXHIBIT P

INDIVIDUAL DATA REPORT

Student Code:

Independent Variables:

Age: Y M O

EXHIBIT Q

Sex: M F

Occup.: B W I

F. Size: -4 5 6+

Sib. Posit.: Y M O

Moth. Work: N Y

Dependent Varibbles:

Mother Characteristics

Age: Y M O Coiffure: S M L Activity: Cook W. C. Wgrk

Animal ID

Hen Hen with Chicks Rooster

Unaided Mother Characteristics

Interpersonal: Supp. Corr. Sexuality: Sexist Neutral Activity: Broad Narrow

 00058